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UNCLAS HANOI 001933

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV AND DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PREL VM HUMANR

SUBJECT: MFA SUGGESTS NEXT ROUND OF HR DIALOGUE

1. (U) In a meeting with A/DCM on July 30, MFA International Organization Department Acting Director Pham Binh Minh formally proposed that Vietnam host the next round of US-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue, preferably in late August 2003. He suggested that Vietnam would be ready to up the level of leadership to the Vice Ministerial level, although he was unsure who would lead on the Vietnamese side. (He opined that VFM Le Van Bang might be the relevant GVN official.) He said that he was unsure who the U.S. equivalent might be, but suggested an Undersecretary.

2. (U) A/DCM cited Secretary Powell's recent letter to FM Nien as describing growing concern over human rights development in Vietnam and doubt over the efficacy of dialogue. He noted in particular that heavy prison sentences since the 2002 dialogue on peaceful Vietnamese activists, most recently Pham Hong Son, had been especially disappointing and worrisome, as indicative of a negative trend. He urged Vietnam to take steps immediately to improve the climate for dialogue, such as releasing peaceful activists, providing more access to prisons and to court proceedings, and becoming more transparent. He expressed appreciation for MFA IO's role in providing updates on some prisoners of concern, and noted that some of this news dated back several years; it would have been even more helpful to receive updates at the time of the releases in several of the cases.

3. (U) Acting Director Minh responded that it was up to the U.S. whether it wished to continue the dialogue or not; A/DCM noted that the USG sought constructive dialogue that led to an improvement in the human rights situation. Minh reiterated Vietnam's own commitment to human rights dialogues, which it now conducts with the EU, Norway, and Australia and is seeking to expand further, as well as a desire to broaden and elevate participation. He specifically expressed a willingness to welcome Ambassador-at-large for Religious Freedom Hanford to visit Vietnam in the near future. Responding to a question, he said that the MFA had no plans at present to host a political dialogue.

4. (SBU) Comment and action request: The GVN seems to be blocking out all of the cautionary but forceful messages on human rights we have been sending since the last dialogue. The MFA in particular seems to view dialogue for dialogue's sake as a goal in and of itself. In responding, it might be advisable to provide a short list of near-term actions -- short of releases of the most prominent activists, which we cannot realistically expect soon -- the GVN could conceivably undertake that would warrant continuation of the dialogue, even at the same or lower level as in previous years. These could include, inter alia:
-- access by emboffs to notable prisoners of concern such as Father Nguyen Van Ly, Pham Hong Son, Le Chi Quang, and Nguyen Khac Toan;
-- access by emboffs to a type "A" Prison (for prisoners serving over 20 year sentences;
-- access by emboffs, congenoffs, and international journalists to upcoming trials of activists such as Tran Van Que, Pham Van Duong, and Nguyen Dan Que;
-- MFA/MPS comments on previous human rights report and international religious freedom report for corrections, inaccuracies, etc.;
-- host visit by Ambassador Hanford; and,
-- invite Amnesty International and/or Human Rights Watch on a fact-finding tour.
Please advise.
BURGHARDT